



UNISON MENTAL HEALTH WORKBOOK

Relationship Check-Up

Couples

A workbook for two people who want to see what's working, what needs attention, and what's happening underneath

Name

Date

unisonmentalhealth.com · Carlton, Melbourne and online

How to use this workbook

This check-up shows what's working in your relationship, how you show up for each other, and where things are wearing thin. Each of you fills it in alone, then you compare. The gaps between your answers are usually more useful than the answers themselves.

A relationship works a lot like a garden you look after together. Nobody plants one and expects it to stay the same. Some beds are thriving, some have been crowded out by weeds, and some haven't had water in a while because life got busy. This workbook is a slow walk around the garden together: noticing what's flowering, what needs attention, and what could use more room to grow.

This workbook is for two people in a relationship, monogamous or open. There are separate Unison workbooks for throuples and for hinge (V) relationships.

How to do it:

1. Read "What's going on underneath" first. It gives you a shared language for the rest.
2. Set aside 45–60 minutes on your own. Don't fill it in together or in the same room.
3. Start with "What's going well". Then map your cycle and rate the statements quickly. Your first number is usually the honest one.
4. Answer the open questions in a sentence or two. These are where the specifics live.
5. Don't show your partner your answers until you've both finished.
6. Use "Reading your results" to find what's working and what needs attention, then pick one of each to talk about.

When not to do this together. If you're afraid of how your partner will react to your honest answers, don't share them. The same goes if there's been violence or threats, or if your partner monitors your phone, controls your money or stops you from seeing people. A workbook isn't the right tool for that, and sharing your answers could make things less safe. Talk to 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732, any time, or speak to a therapist on your own first.

This workbook isn't a diagnosis or a substitute for therapy. It's a structured way to notice patterns and start a better conversation.

What's going on underneath

At Unison, we incorporate Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) into our relationship work. EFT was developed by psychologist Susan Johnson from attachment theory. You don't need to know any theory to use this workbook, but a few of its ideas make the rest of it much more useful.

The fight under the fight

Say you're arguing about who forgot to book the restaurant. On the surface it's about a booking. Underneath, one of you might be asking "do I still matter to you?" and the other hearing "I can never get this right." EFT treats the topic as a clue, not the core issue. Most couples have the same few fights over and over with different topics swapped in, because the thing underneath never gets answered.

What we're all asking

Attachment theory says we're wired to need a small number of people we can reach when it counts. When that connection feels shaky, an alarm goes off, and it's the same alarm whether you're 4 or 44. Johnson boiled the question underneath down to three parts:

	THE QUESTION UNDERNEATH	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE DAY TO DAY
Accessible	Can I reach you?	You pick up, look up from your phone, make time when it matters.
Responsive	Will you respond to what I'm feeling?	You answer the feeling, not just the facts.
Engaged	Do I matter to you? Will you stay close?	You're interested, present, and you come back after distance.

When the answer to these feels like "yes", most relationships can survive a lot of mess. When it starts to feel like "maybe not", even small things set the alarm off.

The cycle

When the alarm goes off, most people do one of two things.

- **Pushing for a response.** Criticising, chasing, raising your voice, asking the same question again, sending the third text. It's a protest: "Notice me. Come back."
- **Pulling back to calm things down.** Going quiet, defending, changing the subject, leaving the room, getting busy. It's protection: "If I don't engage, maybe this won't get worse."

Each move sets off the other. The more one person pushes, the more the other pulls back, and the more they pull back, the harder the first one pushes. Sometimes both push, and fights escalate fast. Sometimes both pull back, and the relationship goes quiet and polite, which can look calm and often isn't.

Here's the most important idea in this workbook: **the cycle is the weed, not your partner.** You're both caught in it. Couples who start saying "we're doing the thing again" instead of "you always do this" have already started pulling it out.

On top and underneath

What you show in the cycle is usually the reaction on top. The softer feeling underneath is the one that would actually get your partner's attention, and it's the hardest to say.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE ON TOP	WHAT'S OFTEN UNDERNEATH
Anger, criticism, sarcasm	Fear of not mattering, loneliness, hurt
Going quiet, shutting down, numbness	Feeling overwhelmed, fear of failing, shame
Defensiveness, explaining, correcting	Fear of being seen as not good enough
Checking up, needing reassurance	Fear of losing them
Irritation about small things	Feeling taken for granted or unseen

Raw spots

Some reactions are bigger than the moment because they're touching something older: a parent who was unpredictable, an ex who cheated, years of being the one who held everything together. EFT calls these raw spots. Knowing where yours are, and your partner's, makes it easier to understand why a late reply can feel like a five-alarm fire.

What repair looks like

Repair happens when one of you can say the thing underneath ("When you went quiet, I felt like I'd lost you") and the other answers that, rather than defending ("I went quiet because I didn't want to make it worse. I'm still here."). It feels slower and more exposed than fighting. It's also the thing that actually changes the pattern.

What's going well

Start here. When you're looking for problems, it's easy to walk straight past what's working. This page is about what your partner brings to your life, how they show love, and what you bring to theirs.

Be specific. "You make my coffee before my early shifts" tells your partner far more than "you're thoughtful". You'll read some of these out to each other later, so write them for your partner as well as for yourself.

What does my partner do, often in small ways, that makes my life better?

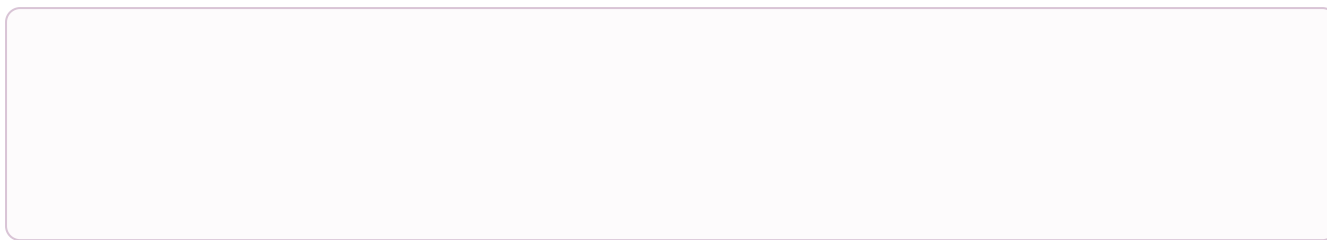
How does my partner show me love? (A text when I'm nervous, the bins done without asking, remembering how I like my tea.)

When did I last feel really looked after by my partner? What did they do?

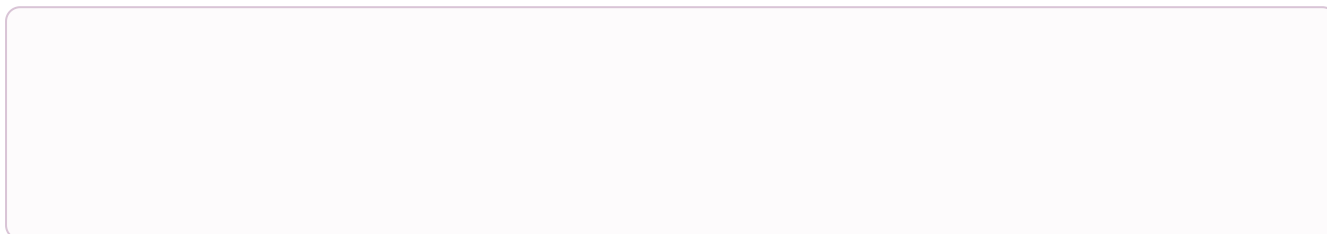
What do I admire about how my partner handles their life?

What does my partner bring out in me?

How do I show love to my partner? Would they recognise it as love?



What's something from the last month I'd like to thank them for?



Map your cycle

Fill this in on your own. Think of a recent argument or a moment of distance, and use it as your example.

I mostly:

- ☐ push for a response when I feel disconnected
- ☐ pull back to calm things down
- ☐ it depends on the situation

What usually sets it off? (a late reply, a cancelled plan, a tone of voice)

What do I do or say on the outside?

What am I telling myself in that moment?

What do I feel underneath? (scared, hurt, lonely, ashamed, not good enough)

What do I most need from my partner then?

When I do my part of the cycle, what does my partner usually do?

Is there an older raw spot this touches?

The check-up

Eleven areas, 60 statements. Every statement is worded so that a higher number means that area is working better.

How to rate. For each statement, write the number that's closest to true for you right now. Not how it was at the start, and not how you'd like it to be.

1 Not true for us	2 Rarely true	3 Sometimes true	4 Mostly true	5 Very true for us	? I don't know, or I've never thought about it
-----------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	------------------------------	--

A "?" is a real answer. If you can't tell whether something is happening, that's worth talking about too.

1. Reaching for each other

#	STATEMENT	RATING
1.1	When I reach out, I can get through to my partner, even when they're busy or stressed.	
1.2	When I share something painful, my partner responds to how I feel about it.	
1.3	I feel like I matter to my partner.	
1.4	I can tell my partner when I'm hurt or scared.	
1.5	When we get stuck in our usual fight, one of us can name it ("we're doing the thing again").	
1.6	I usually know what my partner is feeling underneath when they get angry or go quiet.	

2. Everyday connection

#	STATEMENT	RATING
2.1	Most days we have at least one conversation that isn't about logistics.	
2.2	When something good happens to me, my partner is one of the first people I want to tell.	
2.3	We still do things together just because we enjoy them.	
2.4	My partner is interested in what's going on in my head.	
2.5	When we're in the same room, it feels like we're together, not just near each other.	

3. Communication

#	STATEMENT	RATING
3.1	I can raise something that bothers me without rehearsing it for days first.	
3.2	When I talk, I feel heard rather than corrected.	
3.3	We can talk about a hard topic for 10 minutes without it becoming a fight.	
3.4	My partner tells me what they need instead of expecting me to guess.	
3.5	I tell my partner what I need instead of expecting them to guess.	
3.6	We have words or signals for "I need a break" that we both respect.	

4. Conflict and repair

#	STATEMENT	RATING
4.1	Our arguments stay about the actual issue rather than turning into a list of everything.	
4.2	When one of us takes a break during a fight, we come back to it.	
4.3	After an argument, one of us usually makes a move to reconnect within a day.	
4.4	We can both say "I got that wrong" without it costing too much.	
4.5	I don't find myself walking on eggshells to avoid setting my partner off.	
4.6	We don't keep having the same fight with nothing changing.	

5. Trust and reliability

#	STATEMENT	RATING
5.1	When my partner says they'll do something, it gets done.	
5.2	I don't feel the need to check up on my partner.	
5.3	I trust my partner to tell me things I won't like hearing.	
5.4	Our agreements (about exclusivity, openness, money, time) are clear to both of us.	
5.5	Those agreements are being kept.	
5.6	If trust has been broken in the past, I feel like we've actually repaired it.	

6. Sex and physical affection

#	STATEMENT	RATING
6.1	I'm happy with how much physical affection there is between us, outside of sex.	
6.2	I'm happy with how often we have sex, or the lack of it suits us both.	
6.3	I can say what I like and don't like sexually without feeling embarrassed.	
6.4	A "no" or "not tonight" doesn't lead to sulking, pressure or distance.	
6.5	When our desire doesn't match, we talk about it rather than avoid it.	

7. Practical load: home, money and time

#	STATEMENT	RATING
7.1	The split of household work feels fair to me, including the remembering and planning.	
7.2	I don't feel like the default parent, carer or organiser unless we've chosen that.	
7.3	We can talk about money without one of us shutting down or getting defensive.	
7.4	I know roughly where we stand financially.	
7.5	We make big decisions together.	
7.6	The way we split our time between work, family, friends and each other works for me.	

8. Space and individuality

#	STATEMENT	RATING
8.1	I have time that's mine, and I don't have to justify it.	
8.2	I can have friendships my partner isn't part of.	
8.3	Needing space doesn't get read as not caring.	
8.4	I still feel like a whole person, not just half of a couple.	
8.5	My partner supports things I care about, even if they don't share them.	

9. Shared direction

#	STATEMENT	RATING
9.1	We want broadly the same things over the next five years (where we live, kids, work, relationship structure).	
9.2	Where we differ on the big things, we've talked about it rather than hoped it would sort itself out.	
9.3	We share enough values that I respect how my partner moves through the world.	
9.4	I can picture us handling a major setback together.	

10. Stress and outside pressure

#	STATEMENT	RATING
10.1	When one of us is stressed, the other notices and offers something useful.	☐
10.2	Family, in-laws or exes don't regularly come between us.	☐
10.3	We understand how each other's brains work, including any ADHD, autism, anxiety or trauma, and adjust for it.	☐
10.4	Health, work or money stress hasn't turned us into flatmates.	☐
10.5	I feel like we're on the same team when things go wrong.	☐

11. What we bring each other

#	STATEMENT	RATING
11.1	My partner makes my everyday life better in ways I could name.	☐
11.2	I feel appreciated for what I bring to this relationship.	☐
11.3	My partner knows how I like to be shown love, and does it.	☐
11.4	We still make each other laugh.	☐
11.5	I regularly tell my partner what I appreciate about them.	☐
11.6	I'm proud of who my partner is.	☐

Open questions

Write a sentence or two for each.

- 1** What's one thing about how the two of you handle hard times that you're proud of?

- 2** What's a conversation you've been putting off? What's stopping you?

- 3** When do you feel most distant from your partner? Be specific about the time, place or situation.

- 4** What's one thing you'd like more of, and one thing you'd like less of?

- 5** If nothing changed in the next 12 months, how would you feel about that?

Reading your results

Start with your "What's going well" pages. Read them to each other before you look at a single number.

Then put both sets of ratings side by side and look for four patterns. There's no pass mark. A relationship with several 2s can be in good shape if you both know where the 2s are and you're working on them.

PATTERN	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	WHAT IT USUALLY MEANS
Working well	You both rated it 4 or 5	This is working. Name it out loud, and protect it when life gets busy.
Needs attention	You both rated it 1 or 2	You already agree something's wrong. That often makes it the easiest place to start.
A gap	Your ratings are 2 or more points apart	You're having different experiences of the same relationship. This is usually the most useful thing in the whole workbook.
Not yet explored	One of you answered "?"	Nobody has looked closely. Find out before you assume it's fine.

Gaps are information, not accusations. If you rated 7.1 (fair split of household work) a 2 and your partner rated it a 5, neither of you is lying. Some of the work you do is probably invisible to them, or you each count different things as work. Start with "What made you pick that number?" rather than "How can you think that?"

Some pairs are worth comparing on purpose:

- 3.4 and 3.5 (telling each other what you need). If you both rate yourselves higher than your partner, you each think you're being clear and the other person isn't.
- 5.4 and 5.5 (agreements are clear, agreements are kept). A low 5.4 with a low 5.5 usually means the agreement was never really shared. That's a different problem from someone breaking it.
- 1.4 and 1.6 (saying what's underneath, knowing what's underneath). If one of you rates 1.4 low and the other rates 1.6 low, the softer feelings aren't getting through. That's the cycle at work.
- Your two cycle maps. If one of you ticked "push" and the other ticked "pull back", read each other's maps side by side. Most couples recognise their fight straight away.

Area summary

Add up your ratings in each area and write the total. Leave out any "?". The gap is the difference between your two scores.

AREA	ME	MY PARTNER	GAP
1. Reaching for each other (out of 30)			
2. Everyday connection (out of 25)			
3. Communication (out of 30)			
4. Conflict and repair (out of 30)			
5. Trust and reliability (out of 30)			
6. Sex and physical affection (out of 25)			
7. Practical load (out of 30)			
8. Space and individuality (out of 25)			
9. Shared direction (out of 20)			
10. Stress and outside pressure (out of 25)			
11. What we bring each other (out of 30)			

Start with the area that has the biggest gap. Then look at any area where someone scored less than half.

Pick two

Before you talk, each of you chooses:

1. **One strength** to name to your partner, with a specific example. For example: "4.3. When we fought about your mum last month, you came and found me that night. That mattered."
2. **One pain point or gap** to talk about first. Just one. Choose something that matters but won't blow up the whole evening.

Having the conversation

The workbook does its job in the conversation afterwards, and that conversation goes better with some structure. If it starts going sideways, stop, and come back to it on another day.

Set it up:

- Pick a time when nobody is tired, hungry, drinking or about to leave for work. Sunday morning beats 10pm on a Tuesday.
- Give it 45 to 60 minutes and agree on the finish time before you start. Knowing it ends makes it easier to stay in it.

Run it in this order:

1. Each of you reads out two or three answers from your "What's going well" page, then names your strength from "Pick two". Don't skip this. The hard conversation goes better when you've just heard, in detail, how you show up for each other.
2. Swap cycle maps and read them. Try to describe the cycle together, as something you're both caught in: "When I push, you pull back, and then I push harder."
3. One of you shares your pain point or gap, and says what you feel underneath it. The other's only job is to ask "What made you pick that number?" and listen.
4. The listener says back what they heard, in their own words, until the speaker says "Yeah, that's it". Then they respond to that feeling before anything else. Hold off on solutions until then.
5. Swap, and do the same for the other person's pain point.
6. Agree on one small, specific change to try for two weeks. "Sunday night we look at the week's calendar together" works. "Communicate better" doesn't.
7. Put a date in the calendar to check how it went.

Redo the whole check-up every three to six months and compare it with this round. A score moving from 2 to 3 is worth noticing.

If it turns into a fight, call your break word from 3.6 (or agree on one now), and take at least 20 minutes apart. A nervous system that's flooded can't take in new information, however good the information is. Come back to it within a day. Coming back is the repair.

When to get support

Some patterns are hard to shift from inside them. It's worth talking to a relationship therapist if:

- the same pain point comes up every time and nothing changes, or every attempt to talk about it turns into a fight
- you can see your cycle clearly on paper but can't stop it once it starts
- there's a gap of 3 or more points somewhere important, and you can't talk about it without one of you shutting down
- trust has been broken and you keep getting stuck trying to repair it
- one of you avoids sex or affection and neither of you knows how to raise it
- you're deciding about your relationship structure, such as opening up or closing
- one of you is quietly wondering whether to stay

If either of you is unsafe, the order changes. Don't use this workbook together, don't try couples therapy first, and contact 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732. If you're in immediate danger, call 000.

We incorporate Emotion-Focused Therapy into our relationship therapy. We see clients in person in Carlton or online. You can [read more about EFT](#), [take the match quiz](#) to find a therapist who fits, or [book a free 15-minute call](#) to talk it through first.